

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6192

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

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C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 1886

E.O. 11652: GDS

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SUBJ: WEST BANK REACTION TO RABAT CONFERENCE

REF: JERUSALEM 1406 AND 1439 OF DECEMBER 1973

SUMMARY. INITIAL WEST BANK/EAST JERUSALEM REACTION TO RABAT SUMMIT IS ONE OF SATISFACTION MIXED WITH CONCERN THAT WAR MAY HAVE BEEN BROUGHT CLOSER. RESPONSE REFLECTS MAJORITY SUPPORT FOR PLO AND SEPARATE STATE THAT HAS BEEN PARTICULARLY EVIDENT SINCE OCTOBER WAR BUT SEEMS TO HAVE EXISTED PREVIOUSLY AS WELL. BANDWAGON EFFECT AND FEAR OF PLO RETRIBUTION HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO DEGREE OF SUPPORT BUT HAVE NOT BEEN DECISIVE. END SUMMARY.

1. WEST BANK/EAST JERUSALEM REACTION TO RABAT OUTCOME IS ONE OF SATISFACTION OVER VICTORY FOR PALESTINIAN CAUSE MINGLED WITH CONCERN THAT MORE IMMEDIATE PRACTICAL EFFECT MAY BE INCREASED THREAT OF WAR. THERE IS ALSO SOME RELIEF THAT THE ARAB SIDE HAS FINALLY GOTTEN TOGETHER AFTER PERIOD OF DISUNITY.

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2. DEGREE OF SATISFACTION RANGES FROM UNBLEMISHED JOY OF NATIONALISTS, SUCH AS PALESTINIAN NATIONAL FRONT MEMBERS, TO MORE MIXED FEELINGS OF BUSINESSMEN AND OTHERS WHO HAD HOPED THAT REAL ACCOMMODATION COULD BE REACHED BETWEEN JORDAN AND PLO. RAMALLAH MAYOR KHALAF, REPUTEDLY PNF MEMBER, WAS ENTHUSIASTIC AT DEVELOPMENT WHILE BETHLEHEM'S BUSINESSMAN-MAYOR FREIJ COUPLED HIS EXPRESSIONS OF SATISFACTION WITH THE OBSERVATION THAT MOST WEST BANKERS STILL WANT NORMAL RELATIONS WITH JORDAN ON BASIS OF EQUALITY BETWEEN STATES. LEADING ARABIC DAILY EL QUDDS, IN OCT. 29 AND OCT. 30 EDITORIALS, STRESSED IMPORTANCE OF THE UNITY THAT HAD FINALLY BEEN ACHIEVED IN THE ARAB CAMP.

3. WEST BANK REACTION WAS PREDICTABLE. MAJORITY SUPPORT FOR PLO AND FOR SEPARATE STATE HAS BEEN CLEARLY EVIDENT SINCE OCTOBER WAR. THE ALGIERS CONFERENCE NAMING PLO AS PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATIVE WAS PUBLICLY WELCOMED BY TWO OF MOST PROMINENT ARAB BODIES IN THE AREA: JERUSALEM ISLAMIC COUNCIL AND PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS COMMITTEE OF JERUSALEM (REFTELS). MORE RECENTLY, JUST PRIOR TO RABAT, PETITION WAS ADDRESSED TO THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY BY 182 PROMINENT WEST BANK AND GAZA PERSONALITIES SUPPORTING PLO AND CONCEPT OF INDEPENDENT NATIONAL AUTHORITY ON LIBERATED TERRITORIES.

4. THERE HAS BEEN SOME MENTION BY ISRAELIS OF "SILENT MAJORITY" ON WEST BANK THAT REALLY SUPPORTED JORDANIAN CONNECTION RATHER THAN PLO. WHILE SILENT MAJORITIES ARE BY DEFINITION HARD TO ASSESS, OUR INFORMATION INDICATES THAT SUPPORT FOR PLO AND SEPARATE STATE IS WIDELY SHARED. HARVARD STUDENT LIVING AND WORKING IN ARAB VILLAGE IN CONNECTION WITH HER PH.D HAS TOLD US THAT VILLAGERS HAD CLEAR PRO-PLO SYMPATHIES AND ACCEPTED IT AS REPRESENTING THEIR INTERESTS EVEN BEFORE OCTOBER WAR. LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION VILLAGE PROJECTS DIRECTOR, A U.S.-TRAINED ARAB ECONOMIST WHO HAS WORKED CLOSELY WITH SCORES OF VILLAGES, HAS REPORTED UNIVERSAL SUPPORT THERE FOR PLO AND SEPARATE STATE. JUDITH COBURN, NEW TIMES CORRESPONDENT WHO HAS TRAVELED EXTENSIVELY ON WEST BANK IN RECENT WEEK, TELLS US SHE FOUND ALMOST UNIVERSAL SUPPORT FOR PLO AND SAID SHE "HAD TO DIG DEEP" TO FIND DIRECT SUPPORT FOR HUSSEIN EVEN AMONG TRADITIONAL PRO-HASHEMITES. LATER, SHE SAID, HAD FALLEN BACK TO A CALL FOR SELF-DETERMINATION THROUGH PLEBESCITE.

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5. SOME OBSERVERS TENDED TO ASCRIBE EXPRESSIONS OF PLO SUPPORT TO FEAR OF PLO RETRIBUTION. FATAH HAS INDEED BURNED A FEW AUTOMOBILES AND THREATENING LETTERS HAVE FROM TIME TO TIME BEEN RECEIVED. THIS HAS NO DOUBT HAD ITS EFFECT. MORE IMPORTANT IN AUGMENTING ALREADY WIDE-SPREAD PLO SUPPORT, HOWEVER, HAS BEEN BANDWAGON EFFECT. MAYORS OF BOTH BETHLEHEM AND NEIGHBORING BEIT

JALA COMMENTED SEPARATELY TO US THAT WEST BANKERS TEND TO GO WHERE THE STRENGTH LIES, AND IN RECENT WEEK SPARTICULARLY THE PLO HAS LOOKED LIKE A WINNER. NEITHER FACTOR HAS BEEN DECISIVE, HOWEVER. WE RECENTLY LEARNED OF A STUDY CONDUCTED UNDER HEBREW UNIVERSITY AUSPICES A FEW MONTHS PRIOR TO THE OCOBER WAR WHICH SHOWED THAT 80 PERCENT OF WEST BANK POLITICAL ELITE PREFERRED SEPARATE STATE AS IDEAL. AT THAT TIME 60 PERCENT ALSO SAID THEY WOULD ACCEPT ASSOCIATION WITH JORDAN AS PRACTICAL, REALIZALBE GOAL. WHAT HAPPENED FOLLOWING THE WAR, WE ASSUME, WAS THAT IDEAL PREFERENCE CAME TO SEEM MUCH MORE A REALIZABLE GOAL IN ITSELF.

6. WEST BANKERS, AWARE OF THEIR WEAKNESS AND VULNERABILITY, TNED TO VIEW NEW DEVELOPMENTS WARILY AND RABAT IS NO EXCEPTION. MANY WE SPOKE TO DOUBTED THAT ISRAEL WOULD NEOGTIATE WITHDRAWAL FROM THE WEST BANK EVEN WITH JORDAN IF IT KNEW AREA WAS TO BE HANDED OVER TO PALESTINIAN NATIONAL AUTHORITY. POSSIBILITY OF ISRAEL STARTING ANOTHER WAR WAS UPPERMOST IN THEIR MINDS. THEY LOOK TO THE UNITED STATES TO KEEP THINGS ON THE RAILS AND INFLUENCE ISRAEL IN THE DIRECTION OF PEACE.

7. IN THE CIRCUMSTANCES, WEST BANK OPINION WILL ACTUALLY INFLUENCE DEVELOPMENTS VERY SLIGHTLY. WEST BANKERS COULD HAVE SLOWED OR EVEN ALTERED EVENTS ON THE MAIN ARAB STAGE IF THEY HAD BEEN OPPOSED TO THE PLO AND HAD SAID SO FORCEFULLY. THEY ARE NOT OPPOSED, HOWEVER, AND SAY NOTHING FORCEFULLY, SO THEY WILL BE CARRIED MORE OR LESS WILLINGLY ALONG THE TIDE THAT SEEMS TO MOVING IN THE DIRECTION OF PALESTINIAN INDEPENDENCE OR, AS SOME FEAR, IN THE DIRECTION OF WAR.

8. WE NOTE, INCIDENTALLY, OCTOBER 30 JERUSALEM POST ARTICLE QUOTING NRP SOURCES TO EFFECT THAT ISRAELI CABINET AT ITS NOV 3 MEETING WILL AUTHORIZE ADDITIONAL SETTLEMENTS IN JERUSALEM AREA.
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IF IT DOES, WEST BANKERS WILL LIKELY INTERPRET IT AS REFLECTING NEW POST-RABAT POLICY. THIS INTERPRETATION, COUPLED WITH THEIR OWN INCREASED SENSE OF CONFIDENCE, MAY LEAD TO SHARPER ARAB REACTION THAN IN PAST.
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